

Department of Human Services

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Articles in Today's Clips Monday, March 12, 2007

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Keeping kids safe

Saturday, March 10, 2007

When balancing children's safety against adults' due process rights the scales must fall in favor of keeping the kids safe.

Legislation recently passed by the state Senate and sent to the House attempts to do that by requiring prompt parental notification when day-care facilities are the target of investigations into allegations of serious abuse or neglect.

Sen. Bill Hardiman, R-Kentwood, sponsored the legislation in response to a Kent County case. Parents weren't notified of repeated sexual assault allegations against a Grand Rapids day-care owner until charges were filed and his license revoked -- nearly four years after the first accusation of abuse. That case involved Kristoper Cross, who last year pleaded no-contest to first-degree sexual assault involving children in the home-based day care he ran with his wife. Cross was accused of assaulting three girls younger than 8 between 2002 and 2004. He received a 14 to 40-year prison sentence.

Currently, child-care providers are not required to inform parents of investigations unless they result in the loss of their operating license. That's fine in cases of a less serious nature, say, record keeping issues. But there is no reason for parents to be clueless when their child's day-care center is the target of a high-risk probe. Those investigations include situations of suspected sexual abuse or actions that resulted in a child's death or serious injury.

Certainly, allegations are not proof and people are presumed innocent until proven guilty. Unfounded allegations can tarnish reputations and hurt business. But parents should know when there are accusations of misconduct at day care that could put their child in jeopardy. Mandatory notification gives them the option to remove or keep their child in a facility during an investigation. Having that information puts parents in a better position to make an informed decision.

Last year, day-care licensing officials from the Department of Human Services conducted 74 high-risk investigations. Just over a third of them -- 26 -- were substantiated. Twenty-three facilities were closed; three others had their licenses suspended and are in the process of appealing. That's a small fraction of the 16,400 licensed day-care providers in Michigan. That should give parents some solace, even though one substantiated case is too many.

Mandatory parental notification is not an attempt to ruin people's lives or livelihoods. Making false accusations would be a felony punishable by up to four years in prison. The legislation requires DHS officials to provide written notice of unsubstantiated allegations, which child-care owners could share with parents. DHS would also post probe results on the agency's Web site.

While due process for accused day-care operators is important, keeping kids safe must come first. This legislation does a better job of it than what's currently in place.

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Mother Allegedly Sexually Assaulted Own Children

March 9, 2007 02:33 PM EST

(TV-5) -- A 35-year-old Chippewa Township woman faces charges for allegedly sexually assaulting her three children. The woman's husband was sent to jail a year ago on similar allegations.

An investigation lead authorities to conclude the woman not only allowed but participated in the assaults on the children aged 2, 5 and 11. The kids are now in foster care.



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This is a printer friendly version of an article from **The Detroit News**
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March 11, 2007

Hundreds gather at Stony Creek to remember Tara

Santiago Esparza / The Detroit News

SHELBY TOWNSHIP -- A vigil for Tara Grant started with more than 300 people gathered in Stony Creek Metropark -- a park that relatives said she loved.

They sang songs and talked about the woman that the nation came to know in the last week after her husband was accused of killing her, dismembering her body and scattering it in the park.

"Tara's death has to mean something" said her sister, Alicia Standerfer, of Ohio, before the vigil. "If it can happen to Tara it can happen to anyone."

Turning Point Inc., an organization that serves domestic violence victims, planned the vigil that began at 4 p.m. The park waived its \$4 entry fee.

"I hope they (attendees) came to honor Tara but leave with a purpose," said Turning Point therapist Nicole Wheeler. "That they take what they learned here with them."

Macomb County Sheriff Mark Hackel said a fund has been set up in the name of Tara Lynn Grant to help increase awareness of domestic violence.

"Each day is a gift, hopefully that message gets carried forward," Hackel said, shortly before the vigil began. "We don't enjoy life for what it is. We don't enjoy what we have."

Hackel said the grace and dignity that Standerfer and other of Tara Grant's relatives showed during the investigation made his deputies want to work harder at their tasks.

"It amazes me that they were so dignified," the sheriff said. "They are very compassionate people."

Stephen Grant reported his wife missing on Valentine's Day. For weeks, he and police had a strained relationship because Hackel said he was not cooperating with the investigation.

On March 2, officers from the Macomb County Sheriff's office discovered Tara's torso inside a plastic container in her home's garage. Other body parts were found strewn throughout Stony Creek Metropark.

Stephen Grant was arraigned Tuesday on first-degree murder charges. Police say he confessed to strangling his wife Feb. 9, the day he had claimed she disappeared following an argument.

Laura Johnson, a 42-year-old Warren woman who came to the vigil with her husband, son and a family friend, said she feels really bad for the Grant's 6-and 4-year-old children.

"It shows people that it is important when something like this happens that you come together even if you didn't know a person," she said. "It shows respect."

Anita Bycraft-Walker, a 42-year-old Ypsilanti resident, said she has not been able to sleep since she heard about the murder. She came to the vigil looking for comfort and to tell Tara Grant's sister she feels her pain.

"I have been praying every night for the children," she said of Grant's son and daughter. "I can't sleep because I think about them so much."

The vigil was held less than a mile from where Tara Grant's remains were found, Hackel said. He said he has taken Tara Grant's relatives to the site where her remains were found at the park.

On Tuesday, Stephen Grant's rights to visit his children were suspended by a county family court referee following a petition by the Michigan Department of Human Services. Both Stephen Grant's sister, Kelly Utykanski, and Standerfer, have cared for the children.

More than 200 friends and neighbors gathered at the Grant family home in Washington Township on Thursday to hold another vigil in honor of Tara.

The News reported Thursday that investigators are trying to determine whether Grant had a romantic relationship with German au pair Verena Dierkes, 19. Phone records show Grant called Dierkes the night Tara Grant disappeared, according to a source close to the investigation.

A hearing is scheduled for Monday morning because Stephen Grant's attorney is citing "salacious" media speculation as a reason to prevent police and prosecutors from talking about the case.

His attorney, Stephen Rabaut, is seeking a gag order in Romeo District Court.

You can reach Santiago Esparza at (313) 222-2127 or sesparza@detnews.com

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Mom Of Kids Found Dead Under Home Charged

Neighbors Investigating Smell Find Corpses

POSTED: 7:59 am EDT March 11, 2007

SAN ANTONIO -- A San Antonio woman who police said has confessed to killing her two children is being charged with capital murder.

Valerie Lopez, 19, was arrested Saturday, along with her boyfriend after a four-day manhunt ended. Lopez's boyfriend, Jerry Salazar, 28, has been charged with injury to a child by omission. Police said he knew Lopez was abusing her children.

Authorities said Lopez told investigators that she beat her 18-month-old daughter, Sariah Garcia, to death on Christmas Eve. They said she also confessed to killing her 4-month-old son, Sebastian Lopez, two months later when she rolled over him.

Police said Lopez wrapped both bodies in plastic bags and hid them under her house. The neighbors discovered the decomposing bodies Tuesday, while trying to pinpoint the source of a foul odor they had been smelling for as long as two weeks.

Lopez continued life as usual, having a birthday party for Salazar and buying him roses and chocolates for Valentine's Day, the San Antonio Express-News reported. The couple told friends and neighbors that a dead animal was causing the stench around the triplex complex. They also told their friends that children were staying with their grandmother, the paper reported.

"It didn't seem like it bothered her or him," Tony Serenil, 41, Salazar's cousin and a tenant at the complex told the paper. "Like if those children never existed."

An affidavit for an arrest warrant said Lopez admitted to police that her daughter would not stop crying, so she repeatedly struck Sariah "about the head and body." The warrant said that after the alleged beating, the child was unresponsive. "Instead of calling for medical attention, (she) wrapped (Sariah) in a blanket, wrapped the blanket with tape and placed the child in a trash bag," the document said. It went on to say Lopez put the trash bag in a duffel bag and hid it under the home.

Her bail's been set at \$10 million.

"For whatever reason, evil lurks in some individuals and they kill children," District Attorney Susan Reed said. "But we can't stand by and wash our hands of it."

Reed plans to seek the death penalty against Lopez.

The paper reported that when Lopez was 15 years old she was accused of punching her 9-month-old daughter, Alexis Ramirez, in the chest with a closed fist. Lopez was convicted in juvenile court of assault on a child, the paper reported.

Lopez and Alexis were later placed in a foster home by Child Protective Services after Lopez said she had been abused, according to the paper. Lopez then gave birth to a son, Jeovoni Lopez, the following year. He was eventually placed in the same foster home.

The paper reported that Lopez ran away from the foster home in January 2005, leaving both children behind. Those two children were later were adopted. Lopez then gave birth to Sariah in October 2005.

CPS was notified later of alleged charges of child abuse against Sariah. But when they met with Lopez, she had other reasons for the child's bruises. CPS left the child in the home, the paper reported.

Neighbors, angry with the agency, believe it failed the children by not doing a thorough investigation. Over the weekend, someone spray painted "Shame on CPS" on a wooden board and nailed it to the complex.

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The News-Herald

A Heritage Newspaper

State closes down child care center

By Anne Sullivan
, The News-Herald

TAYLOR — The Michigan Department of Human Services shut down Winners Child Development Center at the end of the day Wednesday.

The center had operated in the basement of West Mound United Methodist Church, 22395 Eureka Road, since March 21, 2003.

The state investigated a complaint Tuesday and found violations of the Child Care Organizations Act and administrative rules regarding maintenance of the premises and licensee requirements.

Maureen Sorbet, a spokeswoman for the Department of Human Services, would not elaborate on the violations issued against the center or Cheryl Collins, who was licensed to operate it.

The day care center's license was suspended and might be revoked by the state.

Sorbet said she is only aware of one other incident when the state shut down a day care center that quickly and it was not in Wayne County.

A summary suspension order from the state prohibits Collins from operating a day care center at the church or any other location.

No one answered the phone at the facility last week.

The Rev. Jim James, pastor at West Mound United Methodist Church, said Thursday he was not aware that the state closed the center. He said there is "nothing he can comment on" regarding the facility.

Space in the church was leased to the center and Collins operated it, he said. The church's Board of Trustees maintained the facility, such as replacing a broken window.

Day care centers are licensed and inspected by the state, city Fire Marshal John Hager said. When the state completes an inspection, it forwards a copy to the city. But he did not have a copy of an inspection for Winners.

The city has inspected the church, he said. But it must skip the portion of the church with the day care center because that is under state jurisdiction.

A prefire survey at the church conducted on Nov. 20, 2003, has a note of a child care center in the basement, he said.

Prefire surveys are done to notify firefighters of what's in a building, such as hazardous chemicals, and where they can stage to fight a fire, he said.

There have been licensed day care centers in the past at the church, including West Mound Christian Nursery in 1989, Wayne County Regional Educational Service Agency Head Start in 1997 and YWCA Head Start in 1998.

The only incident reported to Taylor police at Winners occurred last summer when a child was left in the yard at the facility after it closed, Detective Sgt. Mary Sciabassi said. A grandparent showed up to pick up the child and was told the mother already had picked him up.

Winners was licensed for up to 60 children, according to a press release from the state.

To reopen, Sorbet said Collins can work with the department to resolve the issues that resulted in closing the center or she can appeal to an administrative law judge within the Department of Human Services.

If the law judge rules against Collins, she can take the case to Wayne County Circuit Court, she said.

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Published March 11, 2007

Ratings system for child care proposed

Bill would create 1 to 5 scale for programs in state

By Tanya Bigham
Capital News Service

Parents who want to put their children in day care may have a new way to comparison shop if a new proposal becomes law.

A bill by state Rep. Kathy Angerer, D-Dundee, would establish a ratings system similar to that used for restaurants and hotels to display the quality of services a day-care center, home, care facility or preschool provides.

Factors such as cleanliness, nutrition and education would affect a center's overall score. "If I'm going to drop my child off in someone else's care for most of the day, I want to know that my child is going to get quality care while they're there," said Angerer.

Mark Sullivan, director of Michigan Community Coordinated Child Care, worked on the committee that oversaw the development of the ratings system for two years.

Centers would be ranked on a 1- to 5-star scale.

Sullivan said that there are two advantages to the ratings system.

"First, and most importantly, it provides parents with an idea of the quality of care of the program they are going to put their child in," said Sullivan. "Second, it recognizes the efforts of day-care programs to create a quality program."

Angerer said that since child-care facilities are already observed and evaluated periodically, displaying that information in a way that is both understandable and beneficial to parents wouldn't take a lot of changes from what the state already does.

Yasmin Green, communications director of the Early Childhood Investment Corp., said that her group "applauds the efforts of Rep. Angerer to improve the quality of child care in Michigan."

Green said that such systems have been implemented successfully in other states and it would be a great benefit for Michigan to follow their model.

"Angerer's introduction of the bill is a good indication that this issue is prominently on the radar of our policymakers," said Green, adding that its success depends on sufficient funding and proper planning.

Angerer said that children also would benefit from the competition that would arise as day-care

providers take steps to achieve the highest rating.

The bill would also align with the governor's plan to focus on quality early education opportunities for all children, said Angerer.

Studies show that children in a high-quality day care or preschool are less likely to repeat a grade, more likely to do better academically in school and more likely to go to college, said Angerer.

Others sponsors include Democrat Reps. Kate Ebli of Monroe; Lisa Wojno of Warren; Paul Condino of Southfield; Aldo Vagnozzi of Farmington Hills; and Gabe Leland of Detroit.

The bill is pending in Families and Children's Services Committee.

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Published March 11, 2007

Educational session on foster care offered

BATTLE CREEK — Youth Guidance Foster Care a private, non-profit, Christian foster care agency located in Battle Creek, will be providing an opportunity for members of the Olivet and Bellevue communities to learn more about the foster care system.

Any person who is interested in learning more about becoming a foster parent, volunteering to work with foster children, or who works with youth and would like to learn more about foster care, is invited to join us for this informative program. Information in this program will also benefit those who might know and/or interact with foster families.

Youth Guidance Foster Care is currently recruiting families and individuals to join our treatment team. Individuals and families are needed to provide fulltime foster care and/or short-term respite care for young children, teenagers, and sibling groups. We are accepting currently licensed foster parents and those who would like to become licensed to provide foster care from a faith based perspective.

Sessions will be held March 15 at 7 p.m. at the Olivet Congregational Church (outside of the Wee-Ones classroom) and March 22 from 4:30 - 7:30 p.m. at the Bellevue High School Community Room.

For more information, contact Angelita Pedelty, Foster Home Licenser with Youth Guidance Foster Care at (269) 969- 9438 ext. 18 or email apedelty@citylinc.org or visit www.citylinc.org/ygfc.html.

— *From Youth Guidance Foster Care.*

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Published March 11, 2007

Eight child advocates to serve court system

CHARLOTTE — After much hard work and 35 hours of training, eight new CASA volunteer advocates recently raised their right hands and swore to fulfill the duties of the office of the Court Appointed Special Advocates (CASA) for Kids.

Eaton County Judge Michael Skinner swore in the new CASA volunteers to be the "eyes and ears of the court ... and the anchors in the lives of Eaton County's abused and neglected children."

The newest volunteers bring the total number of Eaton County advocates to 36 serving approximately 56 children.

As of this January there are 90 children under the protection of the Eaton County court system who need a CASA volunteer.

"I am so pleased to see so many good people elect to volunteer with such a worthy organization and give of themselves."

Judge Skinner added: "The most valuable things you will do is be a constant in the lives of these children...I can't stress how import being there for the children is for them."

Brandy Hatt of the Eaton County Foster Parent Association added, "Foster parents value the work done by CASA and just one hour a week makes a huge difference for these children. Thank you."

CASA for Kids is a non-profit organization that recruits and trains volunteers to advocate for children who have been removed from their homes due to abuse and neglect. A CASA volunteer's role is to visit with the children on their assigned case once every 7 to 10 days and provide an independent assessment to the court about all aspects of a child's life.

The CASA volunteer assessment reflects the strengths and needs of the child, the child's family, and caregivers. CASA volunteer recommendations are totally independent of any state agency and are predicated solely upon the child's best interests.

Each CASA volunteer advocate receives approximately 35 hours for training in court procedures, child development, child welfare policies, family dynamics, communication and more. Following the intensive training CASA volunteers are sworn into service as officers of the Circuit Family Court, Juvenile Division.

Each volunteer is generally assigned to one family for the duration of the legal court case, which averages 12 to 18 months.

It is a CASA mandate to provide an independent assessment of the case and make written recommendation to the court based on the child's best interest.

The children of Eaton County who have been abused or neglected by their caregivers are in need of a voice in court to testify on their behalf and in their best interest.

There are many different types of volunteering opportunities with the CASA program.

For more information, contact Kim or Michelle at (517) 543-3974 or e-mail the CASA staff at casa@eatoncounty.org.

— *From Eaton County CASA for Kids.*

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Article published Mar 10, 2007

OUR OPINION: STATE FOSTER CARE

Foster care needs a fix

Children in system harmed by too frequent moves from home to home

A group that monitors Tennessee's foster-care program has found the state's program improving, but it's not at the place it should be yet. Too many children are being moved around too much.

Children's Rights, an advocacy group that filed a class-action lawsuit against DCS, has checked for the last six years on the foster-care program as a result of the court-ordered settlement. Specifically, it's looking at how children are treated during the first six months in the state system. Most of these youngsters find themselves in state care due to abuse and neglect.

Of those, more than 50 percent had been moved at least twice during that initial six-month period. Another 18 percent found themselves in three or more homes during that time frame.

Children's Rights says that number of moves is not acceptable. Tennesseans should concur with that assessment.

These children already have been through the wringer. They don't need a high level of instability once they are removed from abusive homes and placed in foster care.

The report also said the program came up short in required visits by their caseworkers in the children's first eight weeks in state custody.

On the plus side, conditions for foster children have improved since 2001, according to the group. DCS has moved children out of places that were very similar to outdated orphanages and into foster families. A greater effort also is being made in keeping siblings together, which keeps important family ties intact.

Many adults have overcome horrendous childhoods to have happy and productive lives. If the state of Tennessee can intervene on behalf of its citizens and help to make childhoods a little easier for those children in foster care, it has an obligation to try to do so.



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Published March 11, 2007

Justin Sleight: Oliver Towers would be home for those who need it

Justin Sleight of Lansing's Open Door Ministry is chairman of the Capital Area Faith Based Coalition.

Joan Jackson Johnson (Forum, March 4) is absolutely right that putting the homeless in a hotel as a shelter is the wrong approach. A hotel is just a bunch of rooms with a bed and bath.

The Deluxe Inn, which has been recommended by the city as an alternative for Oliver Towers, is such a place and is totally unacceptable.

A "shelter" is a place for the homeless to go at night. But during the daytime, they are turned out onto the streets. Shelters should be replaced by permanent housing.

Oliver Towers is an apartment building with rooms equipped with private baths, kitchens and living and sleeping areas. It would be a home. There are 56 one-bedroom and 43 efficiency apartments, with secured outside entrances. Oliver Towers was built in 1971 by the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development specifically for subsidized housing.

There are already programs for mothers and children and for those with alcohol or drug dependency problems. While more of this type of housing is always needed, there is no supervised place for those who currently stay in shelters, are on the street or are leaving a completed alcohol or drug treatment program. They need a place they can afford and a chance to better themselves by living in their own apartment, where there would be access to support services and guidance.

Smaller may be better for some things, but there is nothing wrong with groups of around 100 in supportive housing. Four examples of successful housing projects of this size can be found in Chicago's Lakefront SRO's South Loop Apartments, which won the 2002 Fannie Mae Foundation Maxwell Award of Excellence; the Alliance Apartments in Minneapolis; the Rebecca Johnson Apartments, East Garfield Park, Chicago; and Michigan's own Ferguson Apartments, 100 units which are part of The Dwelling Place development in Grand Rapids.

More examples can be found by visiting the Corporation for Supportive Housing Web site at www.csh.org/

I agree wholeheartedly with Johnson's statement: "Above all, we should keep in mind that homeless families and individuals have human rights just like everyone else. They should be able to pick and choose their housing unless a disability dictates otherwise. Homelessness is a community problem, and effective solutions are those that involve the entire community in providing long-term planning and support to reducing homelessness within our community."

Picking and choosing one's own housing doesn't happen when we only provide shelters. When it comes to community involvement, the 27 churches backing this plan should be considered part of the community. This faith-based group is more than well-intentioned, and what is wrong with having a little love and compassion? Many of these churches have been involved in caring for these people for years and now see an opportunity to offer a step up for a significant number of needy persons.

Oliver Towers should not be torn down but should be used as it was intended - to create homes for people in need.

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Published March 10, 2007

Schneider: Woman seeks grave markers for 61 juveniles

Sixty-one boys. One grave marker.
And an inconspicuous one at that.

Clutching a folder stuffed with research and wearing running shoes, Nancy Parsons Mahlow wades through shin-high snow at Lansing's Mt. Hope Cemetery, pointing to a block of granite eclipsed by overgrown yews.

It says, "Boys Vocational School Memorial."

"They deserve more than that," Mahlow says, referring to the 61 juveniles who lie beneath a plain of snow unbroken by any tokens of recognition. "They are children who all belonged to somebody."

Mahlow is president of Lansing's Eastside Neighborhood Organization and is something of a neighborhood historian. In that role, she became aware of the vocational school - also known at some point in its history as the Boys Training School.

It was a juvenile detention facility run with the strict discipline and regimentation of a military school. It stood on 289 acres now occupied by, among other things, Sparrow Hospital and Eastern High School.



(Photo by ROD SANFOR/Lansing State Journal file photo)
Concerned woman: Nancy Mahlow stands Thursday at Mt. Hope Cemetery at a marker stone for 61 juveniles from the former Boy's Vocational School (Boy's Training School) buried anonymously between 1855 and 1933. Mahlow's granddaughters decorated the memorial with flowers.

The school, according to Mahlow, operated from 1855 to 1972. It was self-contained compound, where the residents grew their own food. The school had its own hospital and newspaper. Its residents were wards of the state.

Stolen identity

The 61 boys buried near the single marker at Mt. Hope, Mahlow learned, died at the school between 1855 and 1933 - presumably of natural causes.

Some of them may have been orphans. Others may have been abandoned by their parents.

The deeper Mahlow got into the story of the 61 boys, the more determined she became to "give them each an identity."

Her mission: to put individual markers on each of the graves.

Working through the city Parks and Recreation Department, which oversees Lansing's cemeteries, Mahlow came up with a map of the 61 burial plots. The map includes the name of the boy buried in each plot.

Mahlow's now in the process of verifying the spelling of each name, and determining the year of birth and death of each of the boys.

Fundraiser

Also, there's the matter of raising the \$18,000 required to buy 61 modest granite markers.

Mahlow had hoped to see the stones in place by Memorial Day but now thinks that's unlikely. She's shooting for the end of the year.

Mahlow will set up an account at a local bank and accept donations.

A century of anonymity is enough, Mahlow said.

"Each of them was a human being and every human being deserves an identity," she said.

What do you think? Call John Schneider at 377-1175, send a fax to 377-1298 or e-mail jschneid@lsj.com. Include your name, phone number, city or township.

LSJ blogs

It stinks!

People are wearing too much perfume and cologne these days, says one local bank employee, and it's making her sick. Literally.

Check out my blog at www.lsj.com/schneiderblog

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The Detroit Free Press

Local news in brief

March 12, 2007

Domestic violence bill would increase murder penalties

A group of Oakland County officials are scheduled to discuss a bill that would put domestic violence-related murders on the same level as other murders that happen when committing a felony, such as rape, armed robbery, larceny and child abuse.

State Rep. David Law, R-Commerce Township, plans to introduce the proposal at a 3 p.m. news conference today at Oakland County Sheriff Mike Bouchard's office. Oakland County Prosecutor David Gorcyca and Beth Morrison, president of the domestic-abuse and sexual-assault service agency HAVEN, are expected to attend.

"Domestic violence would be a natural inclusion in the felony murder rule, so we wanted it included," Law said Sunday. "If a death results out of that domestic violence assault, you and your case should be handled accordingly and should be handled severely. ... I'm not convinced that's always the case right now."

"Domestic violence would be a natural inclusion in the felony murder rule, so we wanted it included," Law said Sunday. "If a death results out of that domestic violence assault, you and your case should be handled accordingly and should be handled severely. ... I'm not convinced that's always the case right now."



Abuse by intimate partners falls

Laws, social aid make it easier for victims to escape

March 11, 2007

BY FRANK GREVE

MCCLATCHY NEWSPAPERS

WASHINGTON -- Criminal violence against intimate partners fell by nearly two-thirds in recent years and has reached a record low, according to preliminary government figures.

The declines were greatest for nonfatal attacks, which fell by about 65% from 1993 to 2005, according to the federal Bureau of Justice Statistics. Homicides among intimate partners dropped by roughly a third.

The figures are based on the annual National Crime Victimization Survey, which counts criminal abuse against spouses, girlfriends, boyfriends and former spouses, whether it's been reported to police or not. The information, collected in thousands of confidential interviews, is the most widely used instrument for charting U.S. crime trends.

Because nonfatal attacks are hundreds of times more common than fatal ones, the overall drop in U.S. criminal abuse of intimate partners approaches two-thirds. That's the lowest abuse rate since the crime survey began in 1973.

"It's very good news," said Frank Zimring, a criminologist at Boalt Hall, the law school of the University of California-Berkeley.

"There's no way to apportion the credit precisely," Zimring added, but the decline began in 1994 as states and the federal government launched major efforts against intimate abuse.

Legislation helps

According to the National Coalition Against Domestic Violence, legislatures have passed at least 660 measures aimed at curbing domestic violence since then. In 1994, the federal Violence Against Women Act authorized massive new aid from Washington for shelters, treatment, new police initiatives and research. To date, that's totaled \$5.6 billion.

The effectiveness of the effort shows most clearly, analysts said, in a seemingly perverse trend: a sharp drop in the number and proportion of men killed by female partners. Thirty years ago, women and men were killed by intimates in nearly equal numbers. By 2004, however, 1,159 women were killed by intimates but only 385 men were. The imbalance persists in 2005 figures, due out next month, according to statistician Marianne Zawitz of the Bureau of Justice Statistics.

The disproportion in fatalities, while seemingly adverse to women, reflects a major gain, said Richard Gelles, the dean of the University of Pennsylvania's School of Social Policy and Practice: Abusive men are killed less often now because women can get free of them more easily.

"We've eliminated a good deal of defensive homicide by giving women easier access to shelters and ERs and by measures such as mandatory arrest laws" that restrain or punish abusive spouses, Gelles said.

Easier escape from abusive partners also helps explain the drop in nonlethal violence, analysts said. It's a category that includes rape and robbery but consists mainly of aggravated and simple assault. According to the Bureau of Justice Statistics, the 1993 rate was 5.8 per 1,000 people age 12 and older. Preliminary figures for 2005 put the rate at 2.0.

Nearly all that decline was among female victims, according to Janet Lauritsen, a criminologist at the University of Missouri-St. Louis who's analyzed the numbers by gender. She and

coauthor Karen Heimer reported the disproportionate drop in a paper delivered last month at the American Association for the Advancement of Science convention in San Francisco.

Slaps and threats

Even if criminal violence among intimates is down, it may persist at lower levels, in the form of pushes, slaps and threats, Gelles suggested.

"Most domestic violence is pretty rational behavior: People don't go beyond the point where they believe they'll pay the consequences," Gelles said.

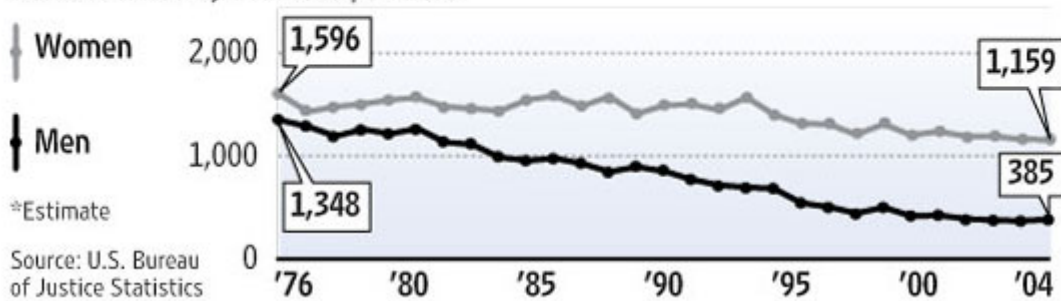
Slaps and threats, he continued, are "something that a victim wouldn't call the police about, that wasn't noisy enough to bother the neighbors and that wouldn't be reported when an interviewer came by asking about criminal victimization."

Even these forms of lesser abuse may be dropping, one study suggests. A team of Pennsylvania State University sociologists asked large representative samples of married couples about minor domestic violence in 1980 and again in 2000 and reported a drop of at least 35%.

Domestic violence declines

Homicides among intimates have dropped as well.

Number killed by intimate partners



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Domestic violence case makes international claim

By Adriana Gardella

WeNews correspondent

NEW YORK (WOMENSENEWS) — At a March 2 hearing Jessica Lenahan will become the first individual U.S. victim of domestic violence to bring her case before any international human rights body.

Her attorneys are taking the step after exhausting U.S. legal remedies for Lenahan, who has brought suits against a Colorado police department for failing to enforce a restraining order against her now deceased ex-husband.

"We requested this hearing before the Inter-American Commission to give Jessica a chance to tell her story to the world, an opportunity she was denied by the U.S. judicial system," says Caroline Bettinger-Lopez, a human rights fellow at Columbia Law School's Human Rights Institute and a supervising attorney for the law school's Human Rights Clinic, who, along with the American Civil Liberties Union, is part of the legal team representing Lenahan.

Bettinger-Lopez says attorneys will urge the Inter-American Commission on Human Rights--an entity of the Organization of American States charged with protecting human rights--to find the U.S. government responsible for human rights violations not only in Jessica's case, but more broadly as well.

"We want the commission to consider the epidemic of domestic violence in this country and our government's inadequate response to it," she says. "We hope the commission will leave the hearing determined not only to investigate Jessica's case and rule in her favor, but also to find that the U.S. must act with 'due diligence' to prevent and investigate domestic violence, protect victims and their children and compensate victims who are harmed by the state's failure to respond when it is aware of the danger."

In a landmark 2001 ruling the Inter-American Commission on Human Rights held the government of Brazil accountable under international law for tolerating domestic violence in the case of Maria da Penha Maia Fernandes.

Lenahan's case will address the issue of what affirmative obligation the United States has to protect domestic violence victims. A decision in the case is expected by late 2007.

Crime in Castle Rock, Colorado

In June 1999, Lenahan's ex-husband Simon Gonzales shot and killed the couple's daughters--Rebecca, 10, Katheryn, 8, and Leslie, 7--after abducting them from outside Lenahan's home in Castle Rock, Colo.

Hours later Gonzales drove to the local police department, opened fire on the building and was killed by police. At the time, Lenahan had a restraining order that required Gonzales to stay away from her and the daughters, although he was permitted to spend alternate weekends with his children and to take them for one prearranged dinner during the week.

While Colorado law mandates that police arrest anyone in violation of a restraining order, officers did not respond to Lenahan's repeated pleas to arrest Gonzales. Lenahan first called police at 6 p.m. on June 22, 1999, after discovering her daughters were missing, and continued to seek help--even telling police where her ex-husband was located--until the girls were found dead at 3:20 a.m. Evidence revealed that Gonzales had murdered his daughters hours before he arrived at the police station, leading Lenahan to believe that police intervention could have prevented their deaths.

In 2000, Lenahan filed a \$30 million lawsuit against the Castle Rock Police Department and three of its members, alleging that they violated her right to due process by failing to enforce her restraining order. The district court dismissed her case, but on appeal the Tenth Circuit held that the mandatory arrest provisions of Colorado law essentially gave Lenahan a property right to police enforcement of her order.

U.S. Supreme Court Review

Castle Rock appealed to the Supreme Court, arguing that the Tenth Circuit decision could spur a "potentially devastating" flood of lawsuits that "could bankrupt municipal governments."

In June 2005, in a 7-2 decision written by Justice Antonin Scalia, the Supreme Court held that Lenahan's due process rights had not been violated because she had no personal entitlement to police enforcement of her restraining order. The dissent, written by Justice Stevens and joined by Justice Ginsburg, pointed out that this holding ignored the clear language and intent of the Colorado statute which, like domestic violence mandatory arrest statutes nationwide, responded to a persistent pattern of non-enforcement of domestic violence laws and was specifically intended to remove police discretion from the decision of whether to arrest the violator of a protective order.

Because the United States has not signed the American Convention on Human Rights any decision by the commission will be nonbinding. So, while the Inter-American Commission may recommend relief for Lenahan or suggest changes in domestic violence laws and policies in the United States, the United States is under no obligation to abide by those recommendations. For instance, even though Lenahan's suit seeks a monetary judgment, it is unlikely that an award would be enforced.

Still Bettinger-Lopez believes that the United States, which has submitted a thorough response to Lenahan's claim, will take any findings by the Inter-American Commission seriously. Its recommendations, though nonbinding, will be influential in building international consensus on the issue of domestic violence as a human rights issue. Moreover, Bettinger-Lopez says, "We expect to win in the court of public opinion."

More Appeals to International Realm

The commission may see more cases like Lenahan's.

Dianne Post, a Phoenix, Ariz., lawyer who has worked with battered women and children for over 30 years, is drafting a petition to submit to the commission. Post expects to file her suit on behalf of a minimum of 15 domestic violence victims who allege that they have been harmed by what Post calls the "policy and practice of giving child custody to abusers and molesters."

While every state requires its courts to consider domestic violence as a factor in making custody determinations, Washington, D.C., attorney Joan Zorza, a longtime advocate for domestic violence victims and their children, says this does not always happen "due to gender bias against women and a belief that we must not hurt a father's reputation." In reality, judges often ignore documented evidence of spousal abuse, claiming that it is irrelevant in a custody case, says Zorza.

Advocates for victims of domestic violence say that a controversial concept known as parental alienation is being used successfully by alleged abusers to remove children from the custody of the spouse who alleges the abuse. The theory of parental alienation, which has been widely denounced as junk science, holds that children become alienated from the alleged abuser because they have been coached and corrupted by the complaining spouse.

"The problem of family courts often punishing mothers for reporting abuse is nothing new," says Post. "But since legislation, litigation and education have not stopped this outrage, I'm bringing this petition before the commission to object to the practice as a violation of international human rights law."

Post believes that Lenahan's case will help pave the way for her arguments that the United States is not adequately addressing domestic violence and send a message that the federal government is ultimately responsible for such state issues as divorce and custody.

Adriana Gardella, a former practicing attorney, is a writer in New York.

Women's eNews welcomes your comments. E-mail us at editors@womensenews.org.



Shooter displayed warning signs

Saturday, March 10, 2007

JOE SNAPPER

THE SAGINAW NEWS

MIDLAND -- The Coleman teen who gunned down his estranged girlfriend at her high school here last week displayed at least four key warning signs of a domestic partner who is prone to kill.

David B. Turner's demonstrated history of antisocial behavior, mental illness, stalking of Jessica Forsyth and illicit lust for firearms make "the likelihood of homicide greater," Central Michigan University research states.

Forsyth, who survived four slugs from a .44 Magnum, had broken off a five-month relationship with Turner the week before he arranged to meet her at Dow High School on Wednesday.

"In situations like this, he may then become what we call a rejected stalker," said Stephen M. Thompson, coordinator of Sexual Aggression Services at the university in Mount Pleasant.

"That's the most dangerous stalker. The couple together fulfills his identity. He has nothing by himself. In his mind, he has nothing left. If he can't have her, nobody can have her. He doesn't see himself living without her.

"This is an extreme result. Most of the rejected stalkers don't do this, but virtually all of them are a potential for violence."

When Turner told her wanted to return some of her belongings, including a watch of her late father's, Forsyth, who was out sick that day, had her mother to drive her to the school, police said. She met Turner in the parking lot while her mother looked on.

After a brief verbal exchange, Turner pulled the revolver from a backpack and shot Forsyth four times. One slug hit a metal plate in her collarbone, implanted from an earlier injury, that probably saved her life and at a minimum avoided paralysis from the waist down, relatives said.

Turner then fatally shot himself in the head on the sidewalk outside the school.

The Department of Justice's Office of Violence Against Women funded a study that found one in three teen girls report suffering violence at the hands of a boyfriend and one in five report ongoing "abuse."

The 2002 study defines "dating violence" as "controlling, abusive and aggressive behavior in a romantic relationship."

Research shows the likelihood and degree of violence increases as a dating relationship becomes more serious. Physical aggression of some kind occurs in one in three teen dating relationships, the study found.

Thompson called the teen dating violence rate "horrible" and yet still "probably really, really conservative."

"It could be much worse," he said.

Every year, dozens of high school-aged women in Saginaw County become victim to severe assaults -- shootings, stabbings, beatings and more, said Valerie Hoffman, executive director of the Underground Railroad shelter in Saginaw.

Hoffman pointed to last month's launch of the National Teen Dating Abuse Helpline. The number is (866) 331-9474 and for the hearing-impaired, (866) 331-8453.

Four of the shelter's 16 women presently receiving treatment after suffering domestic violence are in that category, Hoffman said.

"We still haven't figured out the seriousness of this and how bad it can go wrong, because in many cases this kind of thing doesn't happen," Hoffman said, referring to the double shooting. "But the situation is no less frightening.

"Like any other domestic violence relationship, when the person feels there's no hope, that's when the situation becomes most dangerous. That's clearly what happened in this."

The broader trend of domestic violence among school-age students nationwide is still new, said Thompson, who has worked extensively with police, victims and criminals and is an authority in the profiles of such assailants.

"Stalking at this age is kind of new, partner violence is relatively new. We've never really thought of it very much with college or high school students," he said. "It's becoming more prevalent with younger ages."

The warning signs Turner exhibited included a history of depression and bipolar disorder, a felony conviction for stealing a .44 Magnum and assault rifle and insisting he had to see Forsyth even after her school told him she was not there when he showed up.

"These guys sometimes will give off some red flags, but it's not her (Forsyth's) fault," Thompson said. "(The rejected stalker type) is not something she would recognize. She didn't know." v

Joe Snapper is a staff writer for The Saginaw News. You may reach him at 776-9715.

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The Daily Telegram

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Paving a road to recovery

A new residential program for women in recovery, The Road — A Light for My Path, is soon to open on Front Street in Adrian.

By [David Frownfelder](#)

Daily Telegram Staff Writer

ADRIAN — Through the efforts of Vickie Davis and with help and support from many other people, a new residential program for women in recovery is soon to open in Adrian.

For several years, Davis has been nurturing the idea of helping women in bad situations. She has approached professionals with her plan, accumulating ideas and suggestions.

Now she has teamed up with Teresa Kohler and others to make this dream a reality. Kohler spent the past two years renovating a house in Adrian with no idea why she had bought it.

“It’s really cool that Vickie came along,” Kohler said. “She calls it ‘a God thing,’ and I have to agree with her.”

If everything goes as planned, the architecturally striking house at 137 E. Front St. will soon become home to The Road — A Light for My Path. A board of directors is in place, funding options are being firmed up, and support for the idea is there, according to Carol Zawicki, site support director at Family Service & Children’s Aid and a member of the board.

“When Vickie had her first meeting, she invited a bunch of us (in the counseling field) and presented us with a very nice and thorough outline,” Zawicki said. “I hadn’t heard from her in a while and happened to run into her recently and she told how far along the planning was and asked me to be on the board.”

Davis and Kohler hope the final legal hurdles will be cleared soon, as the board at the Catherine Cobb Domestic Violence Shelter and owners of The Pharm decide whether to allow the home to use eight parking spaces across the street at The Pharm and a block to the west at Catherine Cobb.

The city of Adrian’s zoning laws require a certain number of parking spaces per unit in a house. Another hurdle was cleared when the Internal Revenue Service was notified of the nonprofit status of the home and its board of directors.

Once the last condition is met, The Road will open. The 4,000-square-foot house will have room for 16 residents, referred from treatment programs in Lenawee County. Ten women have already secured residency in the home, Davis said. The house has eight bedrooms and three full baths.

“This is a great asset to the community,” Zawicki said. “We don’t have residential services available to women in this county. We can only offer outpatient services. A lot of people need more. If they want the help, women have



ROAD TO RECOVERY: Theresa Kohler, left, and Vickie Davis, right, stand in front of what will become The Road — A Light for My Path, a residential unit for women in recovery at 137 Front St. in Adrian. Davis has teamed up with Kohler and others to make her longtime dream of helping women in bad situations a reality. — Telegram photo by Mike Calamungi

had to go out of the county. At least we will have this place; otherwise, they would have to relocate to Jackson.”

Davis hopes The Road becomes self-supporting, since the women who live in the home would pay rent. One of the stipulations for residency is to have a job.

Davis said they are also submitting a grant application with the Department of Human Services to help fund possible employment at Goodwill. She was told Goodwill would help find jobs for women in the home who need them. Indigent residents would have their rent paid by the Department of Human Services until they can find a job, Davis said.

“Any employers who would be willing to help out can call me,” she said. “These women will also be required to do volunteer work, so volunteer agencies can also call me.”

The two founders are determined to help women work through difficulties similar to those they went through: divorce, homelessness and health or substance abuse problems. Davis, who lives in the Hudson area, said spiritual support has been an important part of her recovery.

“I had a life based on work and making money when I was 25. I got into drugs and got into destructive situations,” said Davis. “I got divorced and was back into that lifestyle when I was 41. With God’s help, I was able to get through. I feel guided by God. Everything has fallen into place.”

The two women attend Crossroads Church and knew each other as friendly acquaintances. But it took a chance meeting for The Road to begin taking shape.

“I bought (the house) two years ago with the original thought of opening a bed and breakfast,” Kohler said. “The year before, I found myself homeless because of my divorce and I had thought about renting it to women in the same situation.

“Vickie and I both go to the same church and we had sat next to each other but were never formally introduced. When she came to look at the house we looked at each other and said, ‘I know you.’ That made it so cool.”

Kohler’s problems left her with a house nearing foreclosure and in desperate need of repair. Then, everything changed about a year ago when she and Davis had their chance meeting while Davis was looking at possible locations for her venture.

“By accident I knocked on her door and told her all about my project. We sat and talked and she told me she finally knew what God had planned for her with this house,” Davis said. “We are buying it on a land contract and we got the special-use permit from the city Feb. 6.”

A variety of assistance will be available to residents in the home. Along with counseling, some classes in basic skills and business practices will help the women acquire the tools to escape whatever bad situations have been plaguing them. Kohler said she will happily lend her talents.

“I was a wallpaper contractor, but two years ago, I was diagnosed with fibromyalgia and had to give it up. That’s why it took me so long to do the renovation as I’d tire easily,” said Kohler. “Vickie has asked me to come back and teach a basic skills class to the women because they will need it when they get out there on their own.”

The program will help the women address the physical, emotional and spiritual aspects of their addictions and situations. Assistance at The Road is being designed to help women facing a variety of issues, such as physical or emotional abuse, substance abuse, homelessness and transitioning from jail. Davis said residents will have to meet strict rules for living in the home.

“It will be an on-site, 24-hour monitoring program,” she said. “They will have to be gainfully employed within 90 days of moving in.”

Both women credit their strong faith in God for helping them overcome the obstacles life has put in their way. Davis said she believes the best tool for helping a person break away from destructive life choices is a firm spiritual foundation. That, she said, will be the basis of The Road and helping women with their own personal journeys.

In addition to Zawicki, the board includes Joe Satterelli of the Department of Human Services, Sally Welsh and Robert Fultz Jr. of Recovery Lifestyles, and John Haught of Goodwill Industries. Also on the board are Lenawee County residents Leo McClain, Jim Hershman, Lori Sallows from WLEN-FM and Robert Hoffman, manager of a in Adrian, who will conduct a business education course.

Davis said she will be living at The Road once everything is in order and all of the requirements have been met. People with questions are invited to call her at 673-2690.

Donations of household and personal items are needed. Davis said they are just short of being able to make the down payment, and cash contributions are welcome.

Along with the rent payments, The Road will accept monetary contributions, Davis said. A \$1,000 founding member contribution will earn a mention in the brochure; \$500 is a supporting member and \$100 is a contributing member.

-- CLOSE WINDOW--

March 12, 2007

Citizens Who Lack Papers Lose Medicaid

By **ROBERT PEAR**

WASHINGTON, March 11 — A new federal rule intended to keep illegal immigrants from receiving Medicaid has instead shut out tens of thousands of United States citizens who have had difficulty complying with requirements to show birth certificates and other documents proving their citizenship, state officials say.

Florida, Iowa, Kansas, Louisiana, New Mexico, Ohio and Virginia have all reported declines in enrollment and traced them to the new federal requirement, which comes just as state officials around the country are striving to expand coverage through Medicaid and other means.

Under a 2006 federal law, the Deficit Reduction Act, most people who say they are United States citizens and want Medicaid must provide “satisfactory documentary evidence of citizenship,” which could include a passport or the combination of a birth certificate and a driver’s license.

Some state officials say the Bush administration went beyond the law in some ways, for example, by requiring people to submit original documents or copies certified by the issuing agency.

“The largest adverse effect of this policy has been on people who are American citizens,” said Kevin W. Concannon, director of the Department of Human Services in Iowa, where the number of Medicaid recipients dropped by 5,700 in the second half of 2006, to 92,880, after rising for five years. “We have not turned up many undocumented immigrants receiving Medicaid in Waterloo, Dubuque or anywhere else in Iowa,” Mr. Concannon said.

Jeff Nelligan, a spokesman for the federal Centers for Medicare and Medicaid Services, said the new rule was “intended to ensure that Medicaid beneficiaries are citizens without imposing undue burdens on them” or on states. “We are not aware of any data that shows there are significant barriers to enrollment,” he said. “But if states are experiencing difficulties, they should bring them to our attention.”

In Florida, the number of children on Medicaid declined by 63,000, to 1.2 million, from July 2006 to January of this year.

“We’ve seen an increase in the number of people who don’t qualify for Medicaid because they cannot produce proof of citizenship,” said Albert A. Zimmerman, a spokesman for the Florida Department of Children and Families. “Nearly all of these people are American citizens.”

Since Ohio began enforcing the document requirement in September, the number of children and parents on Medicaid has declined by 39,000, to 1.3 million, and state officials attribute most of the decline to the new requirement. Jon Allen, a spokesman for the Ohio Department of Job and Family Services, said the state had not seen a drop of that magnitude in 10 years.

The numbers alone do not prove that the decline in enrollment was caused by the new federal policy. But state officials see a cause-and-effect relationship. They say the decline began soon after they started enforcing the new rule. Moreover, they say, they have not seen a decline in enrollment among people who are exempt from the documentation requirement — for example, people who have qualified for Medicare and are also eligible for Medicaid.

Wisconsin keeps detailed records listing reasons for the denial or termination of benefits. “From August 2006 to February of this year, we terminated benefits for an average of 868 people a month for failure to document citizenship or identity,” said James D. Jones, the eligibility director of the Medicaid program in Wisconsin. “More than 600 of those actions were for failure to prove identity.” In the same period, Mr. Jones said, the state denied an average of 1,758 applications a month for failure to document citizenship or identity. In 1,100 of those cases, applicants did not provide acceptable proof of identity.

“Congress wanted to crack down on illegal immigrants who got Medicaid benefits by pretending to be U.S. citizens,” Mr. Jones said. “But the law is hurting U.S. citizens, throwing up roadblocks to people who need care, at a time when we in Wisconsin are trying to increase access to health care.”

Medicaid officials across the country report that some pregnant women are going without prenatal care and some parents are postponing checkups for their children while they hunt down birth certificates and other documents.

Rhiannon M. Noth, 28, of Cincinnati applied for Medicaid in early December. When her 3-year-old son, Landen, had heart surgery on Feb. 22, she said, “he did not have any insurance” because she had been unable to obtain the necessary documents. For the same reason, she said, she paid out of pocket for his medications, and eye surgery was delayed for her 2-year-old daughter, Adrianna.

The children eventually got Medicaid, but the process took 78 days, rather than the 30 specified in Ohio Medicaid rules.

Dr. Martin C. Michaels, a pediatrician in Dalton, Ga., who has been monitoring effects of the federal rule, said: “Georgia now has 100,000 newly uninsured U.S. citizen children of low-income families. Many of these children have missed [immunizations](#) and preventive health visits. And they have been admitted to hospitals and intensive care units for conditions that normally would have been treated in a doctor’s office.”

Dr. Michaels, who is president of the Georgia chapter of the [American Academy of Pediatrics](#), said that some children with [asthma](#) had lost their Medicaid coverage and could not afford the medications they had been taking daily to prevent wheezing. “Some of these children had asthma attacks and had to be admitted to hospitals,” he said.

In Kansas, R. Andrew Allison, the state Medicaid director, said: “The federal requirement has had a tremendous impact. Many kids have lost coverage or have not been able to obtain coverage.” Since the new rule took effect in July, enrollment in Kansas has declined by 20,000 people, to 245,000, and three-fourths of the people dropped from the rolls were children.

Megan J. Ingmire, a spokeswoman for the Kansas Health Policy Authority, which runs the state Medicaid program, said the waiting time for applicants had increased because of a “huge backlog” of applications. “Applicants need more time to collect the necessary documents, and it takes us longer to review the applications,” Ms. Ingmire said.

The principal authors of the 2006 law were Representatives Charlie Norwood and Nathan Deal, both Georgia [Republicans](#). Mr.

Norwood died last month.

Chris Riley, the chief of staff for Mr. Deal, said the new requirement did encounter “some bumps in the road” last year. But, he said, Mr. Deal believes that the requirement “has saved taxpayers money.” The congressman “will vigorously fight repeal of that provision” and will, in fact, try to extend it to the Children’s Health Insurance Program, Mr. Riley said. He added that the rule could be applied flexibly so it did not cause hardship for citizens.

In general, Medicaid is available only to United States citizens and certain “qualified aliens.” Until 2006, states had some discretion in deciding how to verify citizenship. Applicants had to declare in writing, under penalty of perjury, whether they were citizens. Most states required documents, like birth certificates, only if other evidence suggested that a person was falsely claiming to be a United States citizen.

In Virginia, health insurance for children has been a top priority for state officials, and the number of children on Medicaid increased steadily for several years. But since July, the number has declined by 13,300, to 373,800, according to Cindi B. Jones, chief deputy director of the Virginia Medicaid program.

“The federal rule closed the door on our ability to enroll people over the telephone and the Internet, wiping out a full year of progress in covering kids,” Ms. Jones said.

State and local agencies have adopted new procedures to handle and copy valuable documents. J. Ruth Kennedy, deputy director of the Medicaid program in Louisiana, said her agency had received hundreds of original driver’s licenses and passports in the mail.

Barry E. Nangle, the state registrar of vital statistics in Utah, said, “The new federal requirement has created a big demand for birth certificates by a group of people who are not exactly well placed to pay our fees.” States typically charge \$10 to \$30 for a certificate.

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This is a printer friendly version of an article from **Lansing State Journal**. To print this article open the file menu and choose Print.

Published March 11, 2007

Kids FEAST on nutrition in school program

Junior League sponsors effort to help pupils

By Nicole Geary
Lansing State Journal

String cheese and a story about apple pie brought smiles and at least some seriousness to snack time Friday for second-graders at Elmhurst Elementary School.

And a local volunteer organization leading the lesson hopes repeat visits will create a recipe for better kids' health in Lansing.

The Junior League of Lansing plans to reach more than 1,500 students during each of the next three years - in nearly every city elementary school - through a new program focused on youth nutrition.

FEAST, or Food Education and Story Time, provides a healthy snack and a free food-related book for kids to take home once or twice a month.



(Photo by Rod sanford/Lansing State Journal)
'See the World': Jessica Schaub, Junior League community vice president, reads "How to Make an Apple Pie and See the World" to students Friday at Elmhurst Elementary School in Lansing.

About FEAST

- The Junior League of Lansing, a women's volunteer organization, hopes to reduce obesity-related health problems among local kids with interactive lessons about nutrition. The FEAST, or Food Education and Story Time, program involves monthly visits to Lansing elementary schools, during which volunteers share a healthy snack, read a food-related story and present each second-grader with a free food-related book.
- Visit www.jllansing.org to learn more about Junior League's Signature Project, and to see a full list of the group's community service projects.

"When we get back to the classroom, I just can't stop thinking about the book," said 8-year-old Brittnee Morey at Elmhurst, one of the first four participating schools.

"When they give us the snacks, it kind of reminds me of what to eat when I get home."

That's just what the group is going for.

A record number of U.S. children suffer from obesity-related health problems. The percentage of overweight children ages 6 through 11 has increased from about 6 percent in the 1970s to more than 18 percent now, according to the Centers for Disease Control.

Junior League volunteers, who sneak lessons about food groups and calories between story pages, chose to target Lansing School District because it serves a population at higher risk.

An average 73 percent of its elementary student bodies qualify for free and reduced food assistance. Breakfast and lunch at school are the only nutritious meals some students get daily.

"It's a tough sell," said Elmhurst second-grade teacher Tonya Coscarelli of getting kids to choose fruit over chips.

"(But) it's important, getting to them early."

Gunnisonville, Riddle and Woodcreek elementary schools also are receiving the visits this school year. Six or seven other schools will be added next year and more thereafter.

FEAST is the Signature Project among many smaller community service programs organized by Junior League, a long-standing women's volunteer group.

It has committed more than \$9,000 for the first year. The Greater Lansing Food Bank is providing the snacks.

"Kids are happiest when they're well-fed, physically active and reading or being read to," said Jessica Schaub, Junior League community vice president and a mother of three.

"We're hoping that each student who walks away from this can have an internal dialogue with themselves when they're hungry or raiding the cupboard."

Contact Nicole Geary at 377-1066 or ngeary@lsj.com.

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Effort keeps families warm

Monday, March 12, 2007

By Pardeep Toor

For the Citizen Patriot

With no heat in their second-floor bedrooms, John and Fawn Grout tried to make do by bunking out on the main floor with their 1-year-old daughter.

Like many in the Jackson area --where plant closings have idled hundreds and unemployment has hovered around 7 percent -- the Grouts are struggling through tough times.

They have been thrown a lifeline by a grassroots initiative that donates and installs new furnaces for families and individuals in need.

"It started out as a giveaway -- do something nice for the community -- but people got fired up around here," said Gary Schultz, co-owner of Aspen Heating and Cooling.

Aspen's "Heat for the Holidays" raised more than \$9,000 and was able to help 10 families this winter. Churches and other local groups helped raise funds, and Aspen donated the first furnace and the labor to install all 10. Aspen employees even volunteered their Saturdays to get the installation done.

The initiative started four years ago with the donation of one furnace. But it's steadily grown, trying to keep up with the growing need in Jackson. Schultz said he hopes the momentum continues.

"I hope (the number of furnaces donated) doubles next year, Schultz said.

One of the large donors this year was Westwinds Community Church, which collected \$5,600.

"All these sad stories were taking a toll on me," said Derek Gorton, Aspen's service dispatcher and a member at Westwinds. "I just felt the need to maybe get involved, so I went to church and talked to my pastor."

The program received 34 applicants this year, and a committee at Aspen selected the ones it felt showed the most need.

"My responsibility is to meet the people, shake their hands and tell them they're being considered. I come back, I report to the committee and then we kind of vote on it, think about it, pray about it," said Jimmy Johnston, Aspen's outside sales manager for furnaces and air conditioners.

"Of course, I feel like Santa Claus because I get to go and tell people that they are getting a new furnace."

John Grout called the donation of a furnace a "godsend."

"I can't say enough about them. I know they have helped out many families in Jackson with what they do. The gentlemen were so nice. They didn't think of anything but helping us," he said. "For us to be blessed like this was unbelievable."

\$1 Million To Help Displaced Workers

MIRS, March 9, 2007

A federal Workforce Investment Act (WIA) Dislocated Worker Program State Adjustment Grant worth \$1.1 million has been awarded to the Central Area Michigan Works! Consortium to help displaced workers.

The agency is headquartered in Greenville, but serves workers in Isabella, Ionia, Gratiot, and Montcalm Counties.

WIA money (\$750,000) is also going to the Southeast Michigan Community Alliance (SEMCA) Michigan Works! Agency, headquartered in Taylor.

The funds will be used to support continuing, comprehensive and timely re-employment services tailored to workers' individual needs. Services will include ongoing, long-term job preparation for dislocated workers who have been laid off or who have received notice of layoff and are unlikely to return to their previous industry or occupation.

Readers offer suggestions on how to trim state's budget

Web-posted Mar 11, 2007

By NATALIE LOMBARDO
Of The Oakland Press

Oakland Press readers have sounded off on the troublesome state budget deficit. Through e-mail and letters, many responded with ideas to cut government spending and get the economy back on track.

Ideas range from cutting legislators' benefits to striking state agencies. It's no surprise that most don't want to pay more taxes. Giving public school teachers and autoworkers more competitive health insurance is one way to salvage public dollars, suggested Pat McInerney, 57, of Troy.

"We have been basically subsidizing their salaries by paying for their benefits when we pay for the cars and property taxes for schools," said McInerney, a property tax representative for oil and gas pipeline companies. "They ought to come up with the times and accept higher co-pays and deductibles for health insurance like the rest of us."

Taxes are necessary to fund government operations, says Charles Sornig, 67, of Waterford Township.

"The governor got stuck with a lousy budget, and no one else wants to stand up and take responsibility for the mess we're in," said Sornig, a General Motors Corp. retiree.

But instead of first looking to taxpayers to fix the state deficit, Gov. Jennifer Granholm and the Legislature should "bite the bullet" by reducing their automatic wage and benefit increases, he added.

In addition to a 2 percent tax on some untaxed goods and services, Granholm is proposing to increase taxes on tobacco and alcohol products to replace the Single Business Tax, which expires at the end of the year. The Legislature hasn't acted yet.

The state estimates that it has a \$3 billion hole in the budget for the fiscal years of 2007 and 2008, including the loss of the Single Business Tax, though officials contend the 2 percent plan is supposed to fill it.

Like many, Jim MacLellan, 46, of Commerce Township is strongly opposed to additional taxes.

"My education and research has lead me to believe that additional taxes stifle the economy, discourage investments and often make people 'vote with their feet' by leaving the state. It's been proven that, generally, when the federal government reduces taxes, it then collects more tax revenue," said MacLellan, a commercial lender.

As Michigan is one of only four states with a fulltime Legislature, a couple of readers suggested adopting a part-time, unicameral system.

"The annual appropriation to run the state Legislature is \$115 million. How can the state Legislature ask employees, teachers, police, etc. to accept less compensation when they are the second highest paid in the country with 23 percent more than California - which has three times our population?" asked Henry Woloson of Clarkston. "The Michigan Senate was in session only 98 days in 2006, so moving to a 90-day, part-time format will not be disruptive."

Dennis LaLone, 57 of Waterford agrees.

"Several other states are doing just fine with this system, and the cost of a special election (to adopt the system) will be offset with savings of fewer political mouths to feed," said LaLone, a new and used car sales consultant.

Aside from slashing benefits and government staff, one reader thinks nixing state agencies bound by red tape could improve the crisis.

The Michigan Foster Care Review Board and the Office of Children's Ombudsman - established to investigate complaints in the state child welfare system - are a "total waste of taxpayers' money," said Nicole Christ, 35, of Farmington Hills. With lack of information and delayed response, neither helped her through the complicated process of adopting a special needs foster child, said Christ, a designer resale clothier.

However, Fred Shinavier of Lake Orion believes new adoptive parents assuming all financial and legal responsibility for their children would free up money.

"Stop paying for legally adopted children from the state system who are healthy," he urged.

"The state should live on a budget like everybody else. We've got the highest home foreclosure in the country, and thousands of workers are losing their jobs weekly. Many seniors are on fixed income, and this will only put a nail in their coffin," Shinavier said.

On another note, the release of nonviolent criminals, primarily drug users, would free up millions, said Ginger Hoffman, 41, of Davisburg. "What if we stopped punishing people

for using substances they actually find enjoyable? What if we really just let folks do what they wanted as long as they didn't harm the person or property of another? Wouldn't nearly \$100 million currently spent incarcerating these people go an awfully long way in protecting us from violent criminals?" asked Hoffman, who owns a transcription service.

Consolidating school districts was a popular response.

David Turnquist of West Bloomfield Township said reducing education funding would conserve, as well.

"The governor and her supporters can achieve this with little effort if they really want to help the state," he said. "But right now they'd rather blame the Republicans ... and use our children as hostages, which has been a tactic for 40 years in our educational systems."

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Published March 11, 2007

Triangle: State and city have reasons to avoid office building plan

A Lansing State Journal editorial

Last June, when developer Joel Ferguson officially purchased the so-called "Triangle" property downtown, we wrote: "A routine office building turned away from the river only would repeat the mistakes of the past."

Last week, a legislative panel was presented with a proposal - backed by the Granholm administration - for an office building on the Triangle site to house the Michigan State Police.

Both state and city officials have plenty of reasons to look askance at this idea.

First, let's clarify one thing: Ferguson owns the property. He's a businessman. He and his associates obviously will pursue what they see as the best options for them. Fine.

But state and city officials have a larger mandate. And that's where this proposal runs into quick trouble.

What happened to the budget crisis?

Legislators, for example, have a math problem.

The state is about \$900 million in the hole this budget year. The projected deficit for next year is even larger; the short-range prospects for a vibrant economy (and healthy budgets) are iffy.

Gov. Jennifer Granholm is proposing tax increases and service cuts. Legislative Republicans are making noises about even bigger spending cuts.

So, now is the time for the state to commit to an expensive, long-term building contract?

As detailed in the LSJ last week, the state would sign a 25-year lease with Ferguson starting at \$3.7 million a year. If the lease ran its course, the state would pay more than \$90 million for a building estimated to cost \$45 million.

The ostensible reason for this project is to get the State Police out of its dilapidated digs in East Lansing. Repairing that facility is estimated at only \$2.3 million - at least to cover initial needs.

Maybe this could be a good financial deal for the state long-term, but it's timing and symbolism are beyond terrible.

Then there's the question of siting.

Backs to the Grand

The Grand River in downtown Lansing should be a locus for activity. Yet, for a long time, development along the river has all but sealed it off.

If this Triangle plan goes through, that would make the west bank of the Grand between Michigan Avenue and Kalamazoo Street read office building, office building, vacant City Club, parking ramp, office building.

In his campaign for mayor, Virg Bernero argued on his Web site that "a vibrant riverfront can make Lansing the place to be and the hub of city nightlife ..."

Another 9-5 state office building hardly fits that description.

Now, is an office building full of tax-paying workers better than the existing surface parking lot? Clearly.

But if a new building is truly needed right now, why couldn't the state find a different site downtown? We immediately thought of the huge parking lots southwest of the Capitol.

But, apparently, the state doesn't consider those lots in "downtown" Lansing - and agencies are supposed to be sited "downtown."

That may be the state's argument. Good luck trying to sell it to the taxpayers who may have their own idea about what is "downtown."

Finally, what happened to the housing?

In its previous iterations, the Triangle plan was tied to new housing along the riverfront. In 2004, Ferguson and Gary Granger had a deal with the city to buy the Triangle - and land north of the Ottawa Power Station that would become housing.

City and Ferguson later agreed to let the Ottawa housing deal lapse. Now, the potential result of all this maneuvering is a riverfront office building?

This isn't the best way for the city to utilize a riverfront parcel. It's a terrible message for state lawmakers to send to state taxpayers.

There's a better deal out there. Let's go find it.

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Published March 11, 2007
[From Williamston Enterprise]

Local woman earns 'Star' award

Twenty-four Michigan Department of Human Services employees from around the state are winners of a "Star" award for their participation in the Paternity Establishment Percentage (PEP) Team.

"The PEP Team helps increase paternity established each year for children of unwed parents," said Department of Human Services Director Marianne Udow. "Formed three years ago, the team developed and implemented plans that led to improved paternity establishment."

The "Star" awards are given to DHS employees and teams from around the state for their good work, teamwork and providing quality service. The team members received their award alongside two other teams and five individual employees receiving award during a Feb. 27 event in Lansing.

Local team members, all of whom work for DHS Office of Child Support, include: Kathryn Scott from Williamston.

The Star Award program is an annual employee recognition program started in 2007. Award winners were nominated by peers and/or managers.



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Published March 11, 2007

Potterville resident is designated a DHS 'star'

LANSING — Fourteen Michigan Department of Human Services employees from around the state are winners of a "Star" award for their participation in the Technical Assistance Team - or TAT - Training Unit.

"The TAT Training Unit helps department employees improve the quality and accuracy of the Food Assistance Program," said Department of Human Services Director Marianne Udow. "The team provides training, a statewide conference, and other assets for employees in light of record high and increasing caseloads."

The "Star" awards are given to DHS employees and teams from around the state for their good work, teamwork and providing quality service. The team members received their award alongside two other teams and five individual employees receiving award during a Feb. 27 event in Lansing.

Team members include Fran Snider from Potterville and Lupe Koutsobos from Lansing. The Star Award program is an annual employee recognition program started in 2007. Award winners were nominated by peers and/or managers.

For more information on the Department of Human Services go to www.michigan.gov/dhs.

— *From Department of Human Services.*

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Published March 11, 2007

[From Holt Community News]

Holt, Dimondale workers get stars

LANSING — Twenty-four Michigan Department of Human Services employees from around the state are winners of a "Star" award for their participation in the Paternity Establishment Percentage - or PEP - Team.

"The PEP Team helps increase paternity established each year for children of unwed parents," said Department of Human Services Director Marianne Udow. "Formed three years ago, the team developed and implemented plans that led to improved paternity establishment."

The "Star" awards are given to DHS employees and teams from around the state for their good work, teamwork and providing quality service. The team members received their award alongside two other teams and five individual employees receiving award during a Feb. 27 event in Lansing.

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Team members, all of whom work for DHS Office of Child Support, are:

- Jon Owens from Bancroft.
- Carol Mahaz of Dearborn.
- Harold Weaver of Detroit.
- Carolyn McArthur of Delta Township near Lansing.
- Ian Broughton and Steve Mayer from DeWitt.
- Ardene Martin of Dimondale.
- Norma Sizemore of Fenton.
- Richard Wood of Grand Rapids.
- Maria Candy and Lynn Walker of Holt.
- Norma Potter of Jackson.
- Debbie Bedenbender, Jennifer Garavaglia, Sharene Johnson and

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Crystal Perry from Lansing.

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- Wayne Maybaugh of Owosso.

[Charlotte](#)

- Jennifer Reed for Portland.

[Delta-Waverly](#)

- Great Mitchell of Springport.

[DeWitt](#)[East Lansing](#)

- Ellen Durnan of Swartz Creek.

[Eaton Rapids](#)

- Margaret Batts of White Lake.

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- Kathryn Scott from Williamston.

[Holt](#)[Lansing](#)

The Star Award program is an annual employee recognition program started in 2007. Award winners were nominated by peers and/or managers.

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For more information on the Department of Human Services go to www.michigan.gov/dhs.

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— *From the Department of Human Services.*

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State probe in Human Services' future

Saturday, March 10, 2007

By Jim Harger

The Grand Rapids Press

GRAND RAPIDS -- Two Kent County commissioners said Friday they are confident conditions will improve for black workers at Kent County Department of Human Services after meeting with the agency's director.

Commissioners Paul Mayhue and James Vaughn met for two hours with department Director Andrew Zylstra to discuss complaints they fielded from black employees of the county's chief welfare agency.

Vaughn and Mayhue said Zylstra assured them the problems would be investigated at the state level. Those findings will lead to local changes and solutions, they said.

"I think there's a big, huge communications gap," Mayhue said. "All in all, there was a definite commitment on the administrative side to deal with this problem."

Zylstra did not respond to attempts to reach him by telephone after the meeting.

The meeting came about after Vaughn and Mayhue said about 10 black employees complained they were being harassed and overlooked for promotions. They took the concerns to the department's local board, which ordered Zylstra to meet with them.

Among the black employees' complaints were allegations they were offered less security when threatened, overlooked for promotions and treated with greater suspicion when complaints were filed.

Juanita Glover, a 28-year employee and steward for United Auto Workers Union, told The Press black caseworkers felt the department was run like a "plantation."

Vaughn said he left the meeting with a new understanding of the problems facing the department's 400 employees.

"They've got caseloads of 600 cases each," he said.

"With cutbacks and early retirements, there's a lot of pressure on them."

Recent retirements of several black supervisors left black caseworkers feeling they have lost their "go-to" people when they had complaints, Vaughn said.

In one case where a black caseworker was called "boy," Vaughn said he concluded the comment was made out of ignorance, not racism.

Zylstra promised to step up racial sensitivity training in the department, Vaughn said.

Send e-mail to the author: jharger@grpress.com